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ABSTRACT

The "Teachers as Researchers in the Context of Award Bearing Courses and Research Degrees" is a United Kingdom project that explores the claims made for action research and the criticisms levelled against it. This paper offers a set of "readings" of six action research projects. After Part 1, which serves as an introduction, the paper is in two main sections. Part 2 summarizes six projects: (1) Becoming Our Own Experts, 1974-1979; (2) Learning about Learning/Write to Learn, 1980-1990; (3) Teacher Pupil Interaction and the Quality of Learning (TIQL), 1991-1993; (4) Supporting Teachers Research into Classroom Teaching (STRICT), 1986-1990; (5) Pupil Autonomy in Learning with Microcomputers (PALM) Project, 1988-1990; and (6) Evaluating a School-based, Award-bearing Curriculum Development Scheme (ESACS) Project, 1991-the present. Part 3 analyzes the projects in the context of several themes, including practical control, the theory practice divide, and authenticity; the action research cycle; collaboration; funding; and publication and dissemination. Action research enables teachers to bring about changes in pedagogy and curriculum, improves the quality of students' learning experiences and professional collaboration, encourages insider research methodologies, contributes to both personal and institutional development, helps teachers to implement innovation in ways consistent with values, and enables teachers to be more accountable for their practice. Criticisms of action research include the difficulty of developing valid insider research methodology; the dominant influence of academic discourses or, by contrast, the tendency of reports to rely too heavily on description; ignoring the wider contexts; an absence of reference to known research findings; inadequate training; and unacknowledged hidden costs. (Contains 47 references.) (ND)

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TITLE

ACTION RESEARCH: SOME BRITISH FUNDED PROJECTS: A REVIEW

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PART 1: INTRODUCTORY

The *Teachers as Researchers in the Context of Award Bearing Courses and Research Degrees* project is a UK project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council exploring the claims made for action research and the criticisms levelled against it. The project is set up to examine those claims as they are manifested in 'exemplary' higher degree dissertations from around the UK. As a supplementary study the project is also concerned with how such claims have been manifested in funded research in the last fifteen to twenty years or so in the UK, and that is the subject of this paper. Rather than offer a history of action research, which has in any case been well documented elsewhere (see for example McKernan, 1991), we decided instead to discuss a cross section of different projects, projects which came from different perspectives, in order both to demonstrate the range of activities covered by the term 'action research', and to sample projects from across the time scale.

In the initial proposal, we talked of 'a review of teacher research carried out in the context of some of the major trend setting sponsored projects'. The project director, John Elliott, who has a lifetime's experience in the field ever since he joined the Schools Council funded Humanities Curriculum Project in 1967, provides one view as to which these might be (Elliott 1991), but he and the project team were very aware of the need to canvas other views. To this end, in an initial survey, tutors in schools and departments of Education across the country who were involved in action research were asked to indicate their own involvement in projects past and present. Similar enquiries were pursued in biographical interviews with some of the leading practitioners in the field. Our enquiries were definitively inconclusive.

A cursory reading of the literature, of course, rapidly establishes the central importance of the Humanities Curriculum Project and the work of its director, Lawrence Stenhouse. The Humanities Curriculum Project broke new ground in the extent to which the teachers in school were involved in the development of the project, but the project itself was not an action research project in its initial conception. It has, in addition, been widely written about (see for example Stenhouse {Ed} 1980, Elliott 1991) Thus, while in some senses it clearly is *the* major trend setting sponsored project, I do not intend to discuss it in detail here.

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Since our initial questionnaire had given us no definitive guide either, we decided to take a different tack and to examine a range of projects in order to try to demonstrate the variety of forms that action research takes. What I am offering is a set of 'readings' of six projects, for I am well aware, in these post-modernist times, of the dangers of maintaining that my accounts are in some way definitive. The readings come in two sections. In the first I shall give a narrative reading of the projects, and in the second I shall give an account of various themes that can be read from the projects.

PART 2: SIX PROJECTS: NARRATIVE READINGS

Becoming Our Own Experts 1974 - 1979

In 1974 a group of like minded teachers in Vauxhall Manor School, a state comprehensive school for girls in south London, got together to ask themselves and each other some questions about language and learning. They raised questions about the efficacy of group work and of pupil talk. Talk was their central concern, but they were interested in other aspects of language and learning too, for instance in how pupils developed as writers and readers, and in how best to help pupils take control of their own learning. Though they never used the term 'action research', they were interested in informing and developing their own classroom practice, and retrospectively they recognised that action research was what they were engaged in. There were English teachers in the group, but there were also teachers from other disciplines. They worked for a couple of years without even giving themselves a name, but in 1976 they called themselves 'The Talk Workshop Group' They observed each other's lessons, and videod each other's classrooms. They invited outsiders in, and started working with neighbouring schools. They started producing papers - initially spirit duplicator material, ring bound if they got round to it - which became 'The Vauxhall Manor Papers'. Finally these papers were collected together into a book, *Becoming Our Own Experts. The Vauxhall Papers.* (Talk Workshop Group 1982) The book is almost the whole of my evidence, though I have also talked briefly on a couple of occasions over the years with John Richmond, and more recently with Stephen Eyers, both of whom were involved in the project, so some of the detail comes from those conversations.

Learning about Learning/Write to Learn 1980 - 1990

In July 1980 a group of teachers from Wiltshire and Oxfordshire met for a ten day residential Summer school - known as a Summer 'institute' - at the Cherwell Centre in Oxford. They exchanged ideas, told each other about their good practice, tried things out, kept a journal, wrote with and for each other, and went away brimming with ideas that they had picked up from each other to try our in their schools the following term. They re-convened for a series of evening courses in the Easter and Summer terms of the following

year, and invited other teachers to come along and do the same. After a second Summer institute in 1981, they met for a couple of writing weekends, and in April/May of 1982 they published six booklets under the generic title *Learning about Learning*. A leading figure was the English adviser in Wiltshire at the time, Pat D'Arcy, and it is from her that I have got the story, or rather, to be specific, her story. She did not talk of action research, and the term does not feature in the project publications. Nonetheless the project did feature in our questionnaire returns as influential on the development of at least one of our respondents. D'Arcy drew upon her own experience in London in the 1970s, and more specifically upon the Bay Area Writing Project in the United States, later to develop into the US National Writing Project, which she used as a direct model and which she applied to the Wiltshire situation. The only difference was that she wanted to make the focus wider than just writing, and to draw in teachers from the other disciplines, hence *Learning about Learning* - though writing remained a central focus.

The Wiltshire/Oxfordshire phase of the project ran for two years, and all in all twenty booklets arose out of it, not all of which were published at the time: they continued to emerge through until about 1985. In the original thinking about the project, it had been planned that two neighbouring counties would collaborate for a couple of years, and would then split and look for new partners The cycle would be repeated with the new partners and so on until there was a countrywide network. However this did not happen. Oxfordshire tried to find a new partner but was unsuccessful. Wiltshire turned to another neighbour, Somerset, and worked with them for a further eight years. The project changed its name and became the *Write to Learn Project.* At least another 20 booklets were produced in the years from 1985 - 1990, when the project came to an end.

The evidence I am drawing on for this account consists of an interview with Pat D'Arcy herself on 27th Feb. 1995, and a very small amount of documentation from the project which she was able to dig out from the depths of her study - including a couple of prospectus type documents from the Bay Area Writing Project, a brief position statement {one side of A4} from Pat herself on the *Learning about Learning* project, a summary report on the first two years of the project outlining a timetable of events, some evaluative comments of differing degrees of formality from the teachers them selves, a letter from the US National Writing Project inviting the *Learning about Learning* project to become affiliated to it, and an article about the project from the TES by Susannah Kirkman, dated 6.11.87. Plus all the booklets she could find.

TIQL 1981 - 1983

In 1979 a report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate (H.M.I..) criticised secondary schools in England for too much delivery pedagogy, too much inert learning by pupils and:

> 'little evidence of classroom processes that fostered an understanding of major ideas' (D.E.S. 1979, cited by Elliott 1986 p.vii)

H.M.I. argued for a development of pedagogies that fostered understanding, but at the same time they suggested that there was no necessary conflict between such teaching and the assessment process. In response to this John Elliott put together a proposal to research issues in teaching for understanding which was duly funded by the Schools Council under the title 'Teacher-Pupil Interaction and the Quality of Learning' - the TIQL project. (The lengths some people will go to get a daft acronym!) Dave Ebbutt was appointed as the project co-ordinator and there was a project secretary. The project was based in 10 schools in four local authorities. Schools were invited to take part on the assumption that more than one member of staff, normally a small group, would be involved. In each school there was a co-ordinator, and in-school meetings were supposed to take place, but in addition there were twice termly project meetings for all the teachers on the project. In the course of the project the Schools Council closed down and the Schools Curriculum Development Committee (SCDC) took its place. The project survived the change, and the SCDC. published the final report in 1985 (Ebbutt & Elliott {Eds} 1985). Some of the people involved had worked together on two previous projects, the Ford Teaching Project and the Cambridge Accountability Project, and they were committed to put into practice some of the lessons learned in those two earlier projects.

Dave Ebbutt himself provides a fuller account of the project (1984), and I have supplemented my own readings of the project materials with various informal conversations with Dave himself who is currently (1995) a couple of offices down the corridor from me.

STRICT 1986 - 1990

In 1986, under the umbrella of the nationally funded Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) and via nationally funded Teacher Related In-service Training (TRIST), the county of Avon launched an in-service programme under the heading 'Curriculum Review and Evaluation.' A support team was appointed, and groups of teachers in each of ten secondary schools took part. The teachers were invited to identify problem areas in their practice to which they would like to give attention, and were supported in action research approaches to look at those problems. The teachers themselves wrote up the final reports. After a year the national TRIST funding was discontinued, but the county took over the funding, and the programme ran for a further three years. In the final two years it acquired the title 'Supporting Teachers' Research into Classroom Teaching' - S.T.R.I.C.T. Over the four years that the project ran, the teachers reported on a range of topics including,

for instance: study skills in the sixth form, developing an integrated humanities course, option choices at the end of year 9, foreign language teaching in year 7, controversial issues in PSE, the development of resource based teaching, and so on. The bias was towards the humanities end of the curriculum: in the four years there is only one report on Science teaching as such, though there are a couple on Economics and Business Studies.

The project was co-ordinated in the first year by David Roberts, the deputy head of a local secondary school, and he was supported by a small group of teachers, including Terry Hewitt. The project also had the support of Jack Whitehead from Bath University. These las two stayed with the project throughout its four year run. Terry Hewitt became one of the two teacher co-ordinators in 1987 and it is from him that I have virtually all my data. That consists of four annual reports, his own draft write up of the project as a case study in his Ph.D - which he is currently working on, my notes from a couple of phone calls with him, and a couple of A4 bits and pieces from the project. An account of the project is also contained in McNiff (1993 Ch. 7)

The PALM Project 1988 - 1990

In 1988, the Microelectronics Education Support Unit - MESU (which in the course of the project became NCET - The National Council for Educational Technology), in tandem with Cambridgeshire, Essex, and Norfolk Local Education Authorities (LEAs) put up £250,000 to fund a project to investigate the development of pupil autonomy when working with computers in the classroom. It was based at the Centre for Applied Research in Education at the University of East Anglia. The project co-ordinator was Bridget Somekh, who played a crucial role in putting the proposal together. At the time Information Technology (IT) was a high profile initiative at national level. Computers were going into schools but many teachers did not quite know what to do with them. There was in addition considerable rhetoric around about the capacity of computers to give children greater autonomy in their learning, and to transform the pedagogical relationship between teacher and taught in beneficial ways. In this climate the PALM project - Pupil Autonomy in Learning with Microcomputers - was set up. Three full time project officers were appointed, one to each LEA, plus a full time project secretary. In addition the three LEA IT advisers plus their teams of advisory teachers lent their support in various degrees. Schools were invited to bid for involvement in the project, or were otherwise approached, depending which LEA they were in. Some 120 teachers from 24 schools took part. The substantial product of the project consists of 40 booklets written by the teachers about what they did in school (PALM 1990), and a number of academic papers also arose out of the project. My sources for the reading I am offering consists of this material, but is considerably enhanced by my access to the PALM archive at the Centre for Applied Research in Education at the University of East Anglia. There is in particular a substantial unpublished document called

PALM, the Inside Story (Somekh et al 1990/91) which provides a fascinating and detailed account of the project.

The ESACS Project: 1991 - the Present

In 1991 David Frost, working as a higher education tutor at Canterbury Christ Church College, collaborated with Jim Nixon, the member of staff in a local grant maintained secondary school responsible for staff development, on a school based professional development programme built on action research principles. Rather than basing the course in the higher education institution, Frost and Nixon set up the course within the school itself, involving some eight to a dozen teachers. They were assisted in this in that the school had considerable control over its own INSET budget, and were able to contract directly with the higher education institution for the tutor's time. The programme took off and in the current 1994/95 year there are 10 schools involved.

The higher education institution itself then gave David Frost a small grant to work collaboratively with three of four colleagues to research the course: hence ESACS - Evaluating a School-based, Award-bearing Curriculum Development Scheme. To judge from our questionnaire returns the ESACS project is an example of the sort of action research project that is currently going on in several higher education institutions.

My information comes from conversations with David Frost himself, a couple of papers he has written about the project (Frost 1995a & 1995b), and other documentation he has sent me, including confidential data. What I do not have, for reasons which may emerge below, is any product from the teachers themselves.

PART 3: THEMES AND ISSUES

In this section of the paper I shall offer an analysis of the six projects under some generic headings by way both of categorising my own readings of the projects, and by way of linking them to the wider discourses of action research itself. I shall start with the claims to authenticity and the discussion of the theory practice divide that either explicitly informs or can be read as underlying the projects.

Practitioner Control, the Theory Practice Divide, and Authenticity

Practitioner control can be read as one of the most salient elements that links all six projects. The very title of our earliest project, *Becoming Our Own Experts*, would seem to substantiate such a claim. In their introductory chapter to the book Eyers and Richmond (1982) sketch in the background against which they and their colleagues were reacting. In essence their point is that curriculum change happened outside school. National committees were set up who, they suggest, commissioned reports, designed curricula, promulgated them to the profession, then moved on to the next issue. 'Meanwhile,' they ask, 'in classrooms,

has very much changed?' (p.1) In order to remedy this situation, teachers need to become their own experts and theory and practice need to be brought together

> '..we, the teachers must become our own theoreticians, our own experts. Our theory, our "expertise" is in making sensitive inferences about an actual classroom experience, in noticing what is really going on. If the expert ... has a role ... it is simply to help the classroom teacher to discover what is already there. (ibid. p.1)

And:

> '..theory and practice must be married in the lives of the people who do the job.' (ibid. p.1)

Practitioners need to take control of professional knowledge. They are in the most powerful position to understand it and to do this they need to be in control of the research into their own practice, ie they need to do it themselves. The knowledge and understandings that are thus generated, since they stem from the practitioners' own experience, are seen as authentic, and they are set against the inauthentic knowledge and understandings of the outsider expert. As Richmond suggests, discussing a piece of his own research into his own classroom, 'One advantage which this chance dip has over a good deal of respectable research into children's language is that it is real'. (Richmond 1982 p.57).

The idea of the teacher as expert is also very evident in the *Learning about Learning* project. The Bay Area Writing Project, the model upon which Pat D'Arcy drew when setting up the project, incorporated the principle that, to quote from their promotional material of the time, 'The best teacher of teachers is usually another teacher who has success in a similar situation.' As the statements on the inside front covers of the *Learning about Learning* booklets suggest:

> 'Members of the group have:
> - given lessons for each other as they would for their own classes and shared ideas about how these lessons either helped or hindered their own learning;'
> and
> '- worked together to set up further workshop programmes for other teachers
> (Cherwell Learning about Learning Group 1980 - 1985)

My reading of Pat D'Arcy's account to me, and of the material surrounding the project which she looked out for me, is of a rhetoric of teacher produced insight, shared as equals with interested and committed colleagues in a collaborative venture designed to bring authentic practitioner insight to bear upon the process of improving classroom practice. This rhetoric would seem to have been born out in practice both in the classroom and in the written form of the booklets themselves.

Turning to the TIQL project we find the same rhetorics in place. Readings of Ebbutt & Elliott (1985), Elliott (1986), and the framework document for the project, reproduced as chapter 6 in Elliott (1991) all lend themselves to the supposition that the project was suffused

in the rhetoric of the teacher as researcher. And though the original focus of the project on teaching for understanding was not the teachers', the case studies certainly lend themselves to a reading that suggests that the teachers had a goodl deal of choice about just what that focus might mean in terms of their own practice (Elliott & Ebbutt {Eds} 1986). Outside facilitators were in evidence, but as Elliott himself writes:

> 'Although we helped teachers to collect and analyse data, we emphasised their ownership of it'

and

> 'We didn't frame their problem definitions by a predetermined pedagogical theory.' (Elliott 1991 pp 40 - 41)

In a final retrospective comment Elliott suggests:

> 'In my view this project was the least power-coercive attempt to facilitate reflective practice in classrooms that I have engaged in. It was the project in which I can most honestly claim that the teachers were largely responsible for generating, developing, and publicly disseminating understandings of the pedagogical process. They also demonstrated that, given opportunities within their institution for reflection, they were able to articulate and develop the pedagogical theories implicit in their practices.' (Elliott 1991 p.41)

From the outset the STRICT project too can be read as teacher centred. Hewitt (unpublished), echoing Eyers and Richmond above, quotes from a memo at the inception of the project:

> '"..work will be done in your classrooms and in your schools with support from the team members. We want to promote a practical approach to research which is focused on the classroom experiences of pupils rather than arguments in working parties and committees."' (p.23)

This was echoed in the evaluations of the teachers working on the project. Here, for instance, is a teacher from the final year talking about the project:

> '"It was able to meet the needs of us as individual teachers working on a problem of our own choosing. It had direct relevance to our school and our lessons."'(STRICT 1989 - 1990)

Virtually all the individual project reports across all four years of the project can be read in this way, and it is difficult to resist the interpretation that central to the project was the belief that the practitioners should have control over the research, and that the most useful knowledge for professionals is that generated in the classroom by the professionals themselves. Action research was central to the PALM project too. In an early document setting out the operating philosophy of PALM it is suggested that:

> 'The success of any innovation depends upon practitioners making it their own by relating the theory of the innovation to their own values and practices.' (Somekh et al 1990/91 p.49)

And in the pack that was sent to schools entitled *Some Questions*, teachers were told '..it is important that you choose an area which is of real use to you as a teacher'. PALM had two aims:

> 1) To work in partnership with teachers to research the role of information technology in developing pupil autonomy in learning.
>
> 2. To investigate the effectiveness of action research as a means of teacher professional development in the IT innovation. (Somekh et al 1990 p.1)

A reading of the materials would suggest that this dual aim was experienced as such by the teachers and the project officers involved. Somekh suggests, however that there was a further complication:

> In the case of PALM this was further complicated by the division of the teacher focus into two: use of computers in education, and autonomy in learning. (Somekh 1989b p.111)

The case being made here, then, is that teachers were involved in three innovations at once, introducing computers into classrooms, developing pupil autonomy, and exploring action research itself as a method of innovation. A cynical reading of the project might suggest that the main agenda was the introduction of the technology into the classroom, particularly given the involvement of NCET. However:

> The software used was predominantly open ended - word processors, data bases, graphics packages, Logo, and simple desk-top publishing - though a few carefully selected packages of more structured software (such as adventure games) were used.' (Somekh et al 1990 p.9.)

Such a paragraph suggests an interplay between the project and the teachers in terms of the technology, and it is easy to support such a reading from the detail of the documentation. In addition it seems clear that while many teachers did have problems of adjusting to the technology itself, these were temporary and rapidly solved, and that thereafter the focus for the teachers was substantially on the problems of developing autonomy in the classroom. In all other respects teachers do seem to have had control over the agenda in their classroom, a reading that I would argue would be well supported by the *Teachers' Voices* publications (PALM 1990)

Coming right up to date with the ESACS project, when Frost and Nixon started to collaborate it was once again in reaction to more traditional forms of INSET:

> 'Our dialogue had developed out of our similar unsatisfactory experiences of in-service courses which appeared to us to have failed to lead to educational change. We had both had experience of using action research to evaluate our own teaching and had found it empowering; we were excited about its potential for staff development.' (Frost, D 1995a)

However one feature is very striking about the Canterbury model that distinguishes it from the other five projects that we have considered, and that is the involvement of the school as an institution. They set up a programme within the school:

> 'in a way that enabled us to address some of the school's development priorities in a way that would lead to further professional qualifications for the dozen or so participating teachers.' (ibid. p.2)

In Frost's accounts, and in the other documentation, action research methodology can still be read as being at the heart of the project, with an emphasis on teacher control, and the generation of authentic classroom based knowledge. Those teacher perspectives, however, have also to be seen within the context of the school's wider curriculum development plans. The guidance booklet issued to schools makes this clear in its list of aims, the second of which is:

> 2. To provide a framework to support the school's development planning process. (Canterbury Christ Church College 1993 p.1)

The three overlapping discourses, of the need to generate theory in the classroom, of the authenticity of practitioner knowledge, and of the need for practitioners themselves to take control of the ways in which professional practice is understood, can be read as sitting at the heart of all the projects we have considered. There are, however, other features of action research which abound in the literature, the first of which is the action research cycle itself.

The Action Research Cycle.

To fall into the intentionalist fallacy for a moment, people who write books about action research are generally unable to resist including in them some sort of diagrammatic representation of an action research cycle. (eg Winter 1989, Elliott 1991, McKernan 1991, McNiff 1993) This is inclined to take the generic form: identify a problem, propose a solution, try the solution out, evaluate the solution, identify the new problems that arise, propose more solutions, and so on round again until you run out of oomph. This action research cycle turns up in the rhetoric of three of our projects, is amended in a fourth, but in our two earliest projects, *Becoming Our Own Experts* and *Learning about Learning* is not in evidence. However even if the label was not there the process probably was. Here are Eyers and Richmond from *Becoming Our Own Experts*:

> 'We had an instinct that our own teaching and learning, and that of other teachers in the school, could benefit from critical attention' (Eyers & Richmond 1982 p.2)

This suggests that the teachers were interested in the first stage of the action research cycle, ie in subjecting their work to critical scrutiny, and though the papers in the book take a variety of forms, the bulk of them are case studies, a close reading of which would suggest

that the teachers concerned have gathered evidence, on the basis of which they then developed and tried out new strategies, which are then further reported on. The *Learning about Learning* project was also surrounded by a rhetoric of trying things out in the classroom, learning from mistakes, rethinking, and trying out something else. Here for instance is the opening of Peter Sowrey's booklet, *Everything to Hand.*

> 'Starting the year off with a new class, I was struck by how the majority of the writing seemed to be lacking in depth, and rather stilted, with no feeling of involvement. What was missing was a sense of searching for, and finding ways of expressing thoughts in a fresh way. By using familiar objects around the school as a starting point for work in language and in Art, I hoped to develop an awareness of surroundings, and through this a response that can be more real and felt.'
>
> (Cherwell Learning about Learning Group 1980 - 1985, Booklet 9 p.1)

The rest of the booklet is an account of how, using the theme of 'hands', he did just that. He presents evidence of the children's work which can be read as substantiating his points, and as demonstrating problems met and overcome.

By contrast with the work in *Becoming Our Own Experts*, and *Learning about Learning* virtually all the case studies of the teachers in the TIQL project have an explicit methodology written in to them that can be read as fulfilling the basic action research cycle format. In the framework document for the project Elliott (1991) spells out the action research cycle in some considerable detail, and in the nineteen published case studies (Elliott & Ebbutt {Eds} 1986) virtually all the teachers followed the cycle through - they identified a problem, trialled a solution, evaluated the solution, and made suggestions for further work.

A similar explicit espousal of the action research cycle can be found in the STRICT project. Here is their model:

> Stage 1: Discuss your concern(s) - What are you wanting to improve?
> Stage 2: Decide on a strategy for change and improvement.
> Stage 3: Put that strategy into effect. ie ACT
> Stage 4: Evaluate the outcomes of your actions.
> Stage 5: Modify your "statement of concern" in the light of this evaluation'
>
> (TRIST 1.3 1987)

The project reports can be read as providing fairly convincing evidence that this is indeed how the teachers went about their research. The reports would also support the interpretation that the teachers were self conscious about their own research methods: some reports carrying explicit reference to the above stages, and many open to readings suggesting that the action research cycle was implicit in their classroom research.

That the PALM project was informed by an action research methodology from the start may deduced from the project's aims, stated above. The action research cycle appears explicitly in for instance the resource pack the project developed for advisory teachers, (PALM/NCET 1990) and in a paper given by Somekh (1989a) about the project. Both those

publications include accounts of the ways in which the cycle was exemplified in the work of the teachers, and it is not difficult to read the bulk of the *Teachers' Voices* series in this light.

By contrast with the previous projects the action research cycle in its simpler forms does not feature in the ESACS documentation that I have seen. Instead a model is offered under the title 'reflective action planning' which builds in dialogue between the individual teacher and the schools' management structures and agendas. Thus the first stage of development planning entails that 'Targets and priorities are negotiated with the line manager' (Canterbury Christ Church College 1993 p.4). Frost (1995a, 1995b) draws attention to the tensions that could and did arise between the agendas of individual teachers and the wider requirement of school hierarchies, and details the strategies that were devised to meet both agendas.

In conclusion, then, I am arguing that two earliest projects that we are considering can be read as incorporating action research methods, even though there is no explicit rhetoric about an action research cycle. In the case of TIQL, STRICT and PALM the cycle is explicit in the rhetoric and in the teachers' reports and case studies. The ESACS project provides an adaptation of the cycle in order to accommodate the agendas of individual teachers within the wider agenda of the school curriculum development policy, though as indicated above I cannot comment on whether or how this appears in the teachers' practices or products.

Collaboration

A rider is often added to accounts of the action research cycle, to the effect that it needs to be collaborative. In the case of *Becoming Our Own Experts,* as Eyers and Richmond make clear, the work was collaborative:

> 'There are at least a dozen people who are authors of these papers besides the individuals whose names appear at the top of each.'
> (Eyers and Richmond op. cit. p.5).

At a time of high staff turnover the team of teachers involved in the project stayed around, and came to be viewed favourably both by the school and by the local education authority, and by their own accounts they became firm and close friends and so constituted a powerful self supporting and sustaining group. Collaboration also characterises the *Learning about Learning* project. The first Summer institute was set up and promoted as a forum for teachers to share their ideas, and to work collaboratively with other teachers to develop them. This design followed through into evening courses and writing weekends, and continued throughout the ten years that the project ran. In the TIQL project a collaborative rhetoric was built in from the very beginning, and structures were generated to encourage collaborative work. Thus the first of the aims of the project was

> 'To enable individual teachers to improve the quality of their teaching through co-operative action research into an area of common concern.'
>
> (Elliott 1986 p.ix)

I noted above that the project involved groups of teachers in each school, and in-school group meetings were supposed to take place. As Elliott (1986) notes, in some schools these meetings were more successful than in others, and Ebbutt (1984) provides an in depth study of the factors involved. Elliott reports that the external meetings were more consistently successful at generating discussion and providing a forum for teachers to share their work. As I shall note below, the collective nature of the project design can be read as having a further beneficial effect when it came to developing the case study material in order to give it wider currency and relevance.

My reading of the STRICT data also suggests that the project was designed and funded in such a way that colleagues in school could and should collaborate. Many of the teacher reports indicate that indeed this is what happened, with colleagues observing each others' lessons, and working collaboratively in a variety of other ways.

In the PALM project the forms of collaboration varied across the three LEAs, and from school to school:

> In each school the nature of the team was different. In some there was a whole school approach and the work of PALM was carefully co-ordinated by senior staff. In others a group of teachers worked more autonomously, relating directly to their project officer and the PALM central team.'
>
> (Somekh 1989b p 105)

So far as the ESACS project is concerned, as well as collaboration with senior management in ways already noted, the project is designed to build up support structures within the schools designed to encourage collaboration amongst colleagues. In addition and 15 support group meetings are budgeted in across the year.

In the next section I want to look at the role of outsiders, and at the related role of funding in the projects.

Insiders and Outsiders: Funds and Fingers in the Pie.

At first glance *Becoming Our Own Experts* looks as if it ought to be the 'purest' sort of action research, running entirely to the teachers' own agendas, and generating professional knowledge 'unsullied' by outsider perspectives. Upon closer examination, however, this is a reading that is difficult to sustain. There was, in the first instance, based in the school itself, a local Centre for English, funded by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), and Stephen Eyers, one of the leading figures in the project had 0.8 of his contract employed in the Centre rather than as a classroom teacher. His account is that at various stages he redistributed this amongst various of the staff working on the project to free up their time a bit. In addition the team had secretarial assistance for the time consuming and tedious job of transcribing tapes as well as other typing work. When the time came to put the papers

together to form the book, John Richmond, having moved out of the school and taken up a couple of part time jobs, used his spare unpaid time, amounting to two days a week over two years, to put the book together. When no mainstream publisher would look at the book they borrowed £6,000 from the Schools' Council (or according to an alternative account, £3,000 from the Schools' Council and £3,000 from the bank) to cover the publishing costs, a sum which they paid back in full.

As the project developed, so outsiders were invited in, or came to hear about it and invited themselves in. Rachel Farrar and Irene Robertson both from the ILEA Oracy Project, leant considerable support. In addition a lecturer and a Ph.D. student from the London Institute of Education became interested and brought their ideas and support into the school. A couple of the teachers were doing higher degrees at the time, and used and developed their material in that context. In addition the atmosphere of the school seems to have been supportive of the initiatives. Here is outsider Dennis Searle's characterisation:

> 'The school encourages teaching methods which engage the girls in group work, independent projects and classroom talk. The school does not attempt to establish an authoritarian control and I would describe the atmosphere as hectic but friendly.' (Searle 1982 p 252)

I am arguing here that in fact there was a considerable interplay between a number of factors. Outside 'experts' played a considerable part, though always subservient to the teachers' own agendas, academic institutions had a role either as mechanism for supporting the studies of the teachers, or as the providers of outsider interested parties to contribute interest, ideas and general support. There was financial support from the education authority in the form of the salaries paid to outsiders who devoted their time to the project. And there was the £6,000 loan. Above all there was the contribution of the unpaid time of all of those involved - a feature of much action research.

By contrast with *Becoming Our Own Experts, Learning about Learning* was an LEA led project. In a report on the first two years of the project, D'Arcy indicates that there was an initial £1,000 from the Schools Council, an unspecified, but small amount, possibly another £1,000 from the Department of Education and Science, both of which sums were once only start up payments, and £500 from Westminster College, Oxford for each of the first two Summer institutes. D'Arcy's salary was paid by Wiltshire LEA, and working on the project and supporting it was clearly thought to be an appropriate use of her time, as was the case for the English advisers from the neighbouring counties who collaborated with Wiltshire. All the teachers gave their time for free, and wrote the booklets in their own time too.

My own reading of the project is that the initial idea and impetus came from Pat D'Arcy herself. The Bay Area Writing Project which she had taken as a model had invited teachers who were known to have some expertise to lead their Summer institutes and this is what happened initially with *Learning about Learning*, though once it was going anyone who

was interested was encouraged to come along. In the later years of the project, as it became the *Write To Learn Project,* it was affiliated to the British National Writing Project. This brought an injection of staffing, since the National Writing Project part funded three or four advisory teachers in each of the two LEAs, and their time was available to the project. While the earlier *Learning about Learning* booklets, within the wide brief of the title, can still be read as most distinctly practitioner generated, among the later *Write to Learn Project* booklets it is possible to see in some of them the influence of some of the currents of thought that were more widely abroad in the National Writing Project itself.

Though one or two of the teachers in the project did diploma courses and higher degrees in the course of the project, there was no direct involvement of any higher education institution in the project. It is certainly tempting to read the direct and straightforward style of the booklets, and their lack of any academic apparatus, as being a direct result of this.

By contrast with the two previous projects the TIQL project had substantial funding from the Schools' Council. The project co-ordinator's memory is that the project was funded to the tune of £44.000, but I have not been able to confirm that from other sources. There was a full time co-ordinator and four part time facilitators, and the director was also able to devote time to it. Elliott (1986) suggests that this support team had dual roles:

> 'The first was to engage in dialogue with teachers about the substantive problems being investigated' (p.x)

and the second

> 'involved assisting teachers with the selection of techniques for data collection and analysis, in terms of their relevance to the problems being investigated' (p.xi)

The 'outsiders' were always concerned, however,

> 'that any ideas and insights they contributed should be subordinate to their second role as action research facilitators' (p.x)

The funding did not run to supply time for the teachers involved. The project team required that there should be a commitment to the project from the head/senior management of the schools, and also looked for schools in which there was a member of staff willing to act as the in-school co-ordinator, who had had some previous contact with the Cambridge Institute and its action research approaches to curriculum development. Ebbutt (1984) suggests the role of these in-school co-ordinators was crucial to the success or failure of the project. In addition:

> 'the relevant Local Education Authorities were asked to appoint an adviser/inspector to act as a liaison between the project and the Local Education Authority generally' (Elliott 1986 p.xi)

I cannot find enough in the accounts of the project to offer a reading of what this actually meant on the ground.

Like *Learning about Learning* the STRICT project was LEA led. A team of six people were funded for one day per fortnight to support the work of the teachers in the

schools. This team included the team leader, the deputy head of a local secondary school, and a consultant from higher education - Jack Whitehead from Bath University. In addition each of the ten schools that took part had 15 days of supply cover. There were monthly workshops where teachers from different schools could meet each other. The pattern varied somewhat as the LEA took over full responsibility for the funding in the second and subsequent years but there was a continuing higher education presence throughout the project, Jack Whitehead specifically being involved all the way through. Hewitt (unpublished) writes that from the outset he:

> 'argued that the participation of higher education was vital to the comparative success of (the project)' (p.37),

and he suggests that the

> 'lecturer in education at a local university ... may arguably have been the "architect" who was to consciously and carefully design the network that was to follow.' (p.22)

Despite his recognition of the importance of input from higher education, Hewitt felt it was important that a practising teacher should have the role of co-ordinator. He writes,

> 'I was driven by an intuitive feeling that it was not only appropriate but also important that the role of co-ordinator should be filled by a teacher' (p.28)

From colleagues in higher education he

> 'appreciated support in a consultancy capacity but was wary about "control"'.(p.28)

The rhetoric places the outsiders firmly in an enabling role rather than in a directive one, and the individual teachers' reports, and the evaluative comments from the teachers in all the annual reports more than support such a reading.

As indicated above the PALM project had substantial funding - some £250,000. By and large there was no supply time for the teachers, and the bulk of the writing was done in teachers' own time. There were after school workshops, and two longer project conferences. The project officers had been chosen on the basis of their expertise in IT, not action research itself - indeed as part of their own induction they had a two week course on action research methodology. It seems clear that they were in and out of the schools the whole time, both providing advice about the technology itself, and helping teachers with the research process. The *Teachers' Voices* series (PALM 1990) would certainly support such a reading.
As I have done with other projects, above, I am arguing that outside funding and outsider help was important to the project. It was the funded proposal after all that gave the project its focus on autonomous learning with microcomputers, and outsider 'expertise' seems to have made a vital contribution to its success.

Learning about Learning and STRICT, both of which were local education authority funded in one-way or another, both came to an end in 1990. In both cases the reason offered was the same: LEA budgets dried up as resources were delegated from the LEAs into schools themselves. The ESACS project can be read as a response to these new circumstances as an

higher education institution deals directly with the schools themselves. School in-service budgets are put to use to support the scheme and to buy in the outside facilitator. The involvement of the higher education institution from the outset in the project has meant the involvement of outsiders in the schools, and the higher education institution sees it as a proper use of the higher education tutor's time to develop and support such a scheme. In addition in-house funding has enabled David Frost himself to investigate and write up the project. For the first time too a project is predicated upon the achievement of academic awards at higher diploma and masters level for the teachers involved.

In conclusion I am arguing that all six projects share a rhetoric of outsiders as facilitators, though in the case of PALM the outsiders did bring with them an expertise in the technology. In *Becoming Our Own Experts* and STRICT the teachers had complete control over their research focus though the two projects are dissimilar in other ways, and in the ESACS project that control is shared by the teachers and the school. In the other three projects the focus of the research comes from outside: writing and learning in the case of *Learning about Learning*; teaching for understanding in the case of TIQL; and developing autonomy in learning with computers in the case of PALM. Within those broad general categories the teachers had a lot of leeway to control actual focus of their research, as the variety of the teachers' work in all three projects demonstrates.

Two of the projects had substantial funding from outside agencies. The other four had a certain amount of hidden funding in the form of people's salaries, as well as bits and pieces of funding from various sources by way of pump priming and so forth. Crucially all of the projects depended upon teachers giving of substantial amounts of their own time. Only the STRICT project built in supply time, and given the number of teachers involved that must have been spread pretty thinly. All the writing up in all the projects was done by the teachers themselves, representing a considerable investment of unpaid person hours.

Publication and Dissemination: Contributions to Educational Knowledge

One of the criticisms that is levelled against action research studies is that they tend not to make much of a contribution to their substantive field of study, and that there is a tendency for action research projects to re-invent the wheel. Against this it is argued that the purpose of action research is primarily to change practice, and that the contribution to wider educational and professional knowledge comes from accounts of how that might happen in changing circumstances and contexts. Of the projects that we have been examining, two of the projects, STRICT and the ESACS project would largely, in my view, fall into that latter category, both offering explicit rhetorics in support of such a position. The other four projects, however, while never losing sight of the primary aim of changing practice in the

classroom, nonetheless also have, I would suggest, something more to offer. I shall take them in turn.

The loan given to the Vauxhall Manor teachers enabled them to publish *Becoming Your Own Experts* as a printed book between hard covers that wouldn't look in any way out of place beside other books on a typical library shelf. Most of the studies in the book tackle areas of substantive interest which can be read as being in the forefront of educational concern at the time. Thus for example Minker's survey (1982) of the languages spoken in the school predates Rosen and Burgess's larger scale survey (1980) for all the discrepancies in publication date. And several of the studies of pupils' language and talk provide, in my view as a language in education person which I was before I wore my current identity, give detail of analysis not to be found elsewhere. The contributors give 'straightforward' narrative accounts of the work they did in the classroom, or of their research. It is difficult to read any substantial *reflexivity* about their own research and development processes into the accounts, though it is easy to read them as accounts of a *reflective* approach to practice. The team worked hard to promote and sell the book, and as I suggested above, they were able to pay back the loan in full. This would suggest at least that the book found a readership.

The *Learning about Learning* publications (Cherwell Learning about Learning Group 1980 - 1985) consist of a series of folded and stapled A4 booklets of variable print quality, though the later *Write to Learn* (Write to Learn 1985 - 1990) booklets are a bit smarter. They too consist of straightforward accounts of practice with no academic apparatus of referencing, nor yet any account of research methodology. While, as I have suggested above, some of the work can be read as being part of wider initiatives, many of the booklets can be read as filling in considerably useful detail about what such initiatives might actually look like in the classroom. The earlier booklets, for instance, offer accounts of teachers developing the use of journals, and collaborative writing in the classroom, in ways which were pretty new at the time, and some of the later booklets can be read as making a substantive contribution to knowledge about emergent writing.

They were widely disseminated within the project and the LEAs involved but no great effort was made to sell them nationwide, though box loads were taken to national conferences and distributed/sold for a nominal sum. In an effort to keep the copyright with the individual teacher authors the booklets were not published by the county themselves, and they come with minimal publication details, and undated, and copies were often made up and run off by the teachers themselves. Despite this low key approach some of the booklets were apparently in considerable demand, and more general appreciative evaluative comments from teachers who participated in the project over the years suggests that they found an audience.

The TIQL project too had as its first aim the improvement of teachers practice, but this aim was given equal importance with the aim:

> 'to contribute to the development of a common professional culture ie a common stock of professional insights about teaching and learning processes.'
> (Elliott 1986 p.ix)

The project team used specific strategies to try to meet this aim. In the first phase of the project the teachers wrote individual case studies of their own practice (Elliott & Ebbutt {Eds.} 1986). and it is not difficult to read them as showing evidence of improvement to the specific situations of the teachers' own practices - what the project team called 'internal' validity. In order to achieve wider generalisability, what the project team called 'external validity', all the participants met over a weekend conference to identify underlying themes that ran through the individual case studies. The work done at this conference provided the basis for the final report of the project, again written by the teachers themselves (Ebbutt & Elliott {Eds.} 1985). The report comes as a fairly substantial paper bound A4 document in typescript. Though published by a mainstream publishing house, Longmans, it carries the SCDC (Schools Curriculum Development Committee) abbreviation on the front, and all in all it has the appearance of an 'official' document. It includes some ten chapters written by various of the project participants covering such themes as the relationship between teaching for understanding and exams, motivation, pupil disaffection, the relationship between language and understanding. These chapters can be read as 'higher order' generalisation, designed to draw more general issues out of the specific case studies that are quoted. The 'tone' of the chapters can be read as more 'academic' than 'straightforward' narrative accounts of practice, though a sense of the underlying practice can be read as coming through strongly. It is very possible to read these as contributing wider professional knowledge.

Central to the PALM project, as indeed it is central to all the other projects I have looked at, is the notion that teachers should write up their own work. Their style and content is indicated by the following, which appears in the inside cover of the *Teachers Voices* series:

> 'The TEACHERS' VOICES series presents a range of reflections on the use of information technology in the classroom. Although not all are formally research reports, all arise from the work of teachers engaged in action research ... They are written to be read using a range of styles and formats ... all setting out to avoid technical and educational jargon.' (PALM 1990)

The booklets were desk top published and were sold, and still are being sold through the higher education institution that produced them.

Like TIQL before it, the project used specific strategies to generate wider professional insight. In the first of the two annual weekend conferences the project team had raised a number of questions to focus the research on the problematic nature of autonomy, and the ways in which it could be supported and developed in the classroom. My own reading of the *Teachers' Voices* booklets suggests that collectively they do make a substantial contribution to the detail both of handling the new technology in the classroom and the problems of

developing autonomous learning in the pupils, with plentiful examples of what can be achieved.

At a final conference the questions about autonomy were revisited, and a document *Shared Perspectives* (Davies 1990) was produced which discussed them in some detail. *Shared Perspectives* was never published, though it is summarised in an overview in Somekh and Davies (1992). If I may allow my own voice, just for once, to emerge a little more strongly, I think it is a shame that *Shared Perspectives* never got published, since for me it presents the central concerns of the project in a way that is accessible to teachers, but which does not obscure the complexity of the findings, and would certainly have constituted a useful contribution to the wider educational debate.

With the STRICT project the emphasis changes. There is in the first instance no substantive central focus to the project, thus one group of teachers may have been developing a combined humanities curriculum, while another was looking at the problems of assimilating girls into an all boys sixth form. Basically 'The aim was to effect change in classrooms.' (Hewitt unpublished p.31). It can be read as being a central tenet of the project that written reports should be produced by the teachers themselves, and this is what happened. However the purpose of the written reports can be read in a number of ways. They were produced in the form of annual reports for each of the four years which come as clipped together or ring bound A4 documents. Hewitt quotes from a memo at the time they were setting up the project:

> '"If the LEA is to be persuaded to apportion a part of its INSET budget to support such activities ... participant schools ... need to show some 'end product' from the year long process we have all engaged in."' (ibid. p.26)

He adds that the first report:

> 'was given comparatively limited circulation - participants, TRIST co-ordinator, TRIST evaluation team and INSET advisers.' (ibid. p.26)

The timing of all the reports for the end of the financial year rather than the end of the school year bears out this official accountability role.

Hewitt suggests elsewhere that the reports have been 'an effective means of dissemination within the LEA and beyond', and it is in terms of rendering the process of practitioner research public that the reports can be read as contributing to wider educational and professional knowledge. In addition it is possible to read a concern with pupil perspectives and how to access them in many of the reports, and that too would seem to be of wider professional interest.

With the ESACS project the emphasis changes again since the central role of the HE institution can be read as having brought with it an academic framing to the work of the participating teachers. As the guidance booklet makes clear, one of the aims of the scheme is:

> 4. To enable participants to achieve greater recognition and credit for their curriculum development work in the form of advanced professional qualifications at Diploma (Part 2), M.Ed. and MA levels.
> (Canterbury Christ Church College 1993 p.1)

A central focus of the project has been on the form that teachers might be enabled to write up their work in ways that will satisfy the academic requirements of the course, and will also be most beneficial to their own professional development. To this end the concept of the portfolio has been developed which is designed to contain accumulated data alongside more analytical commentary. In addition teachers write reports for senior management or in other ways account for their work within the school hierarchies. In its very nature much of this work will not be in the public domain, therefore questions of wider dissemination and publication do not arise. As Frost notes, citing Elliott, the main purpose of action research is '"to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge'"(Frost 1995a p.7) However Frost also suggests,

> 'Case studies are published, (within the school or beyond) *not* as a way of proposing generalisations about practice but as a way of making visible the issues which arose in particular circumstances. By reading such case studies others may be able to reflect on their own practice and set agendas for change but, in addition, principles of procedure can be identified and disseminated as hypotheses. (ibid. p19)

As I noted above I have not seen any of the work of the participating teachers so I do not feel able to comment further on such claims so far as they are concerned. Frost's own work, of course, which also stems from an action research investigation of his own practice, has already produced two papers much referenced in this section which can certainly be read as meeting such claims.

Writing to Understand

In this section I want to briefly highlight another function for writing which emerges explicitly from four of the projects, and that is writing in order to promote the writer's own understanding. Writing and learning was of course a central focus for the *Learning about Learning* project and a couple of booklets focus on the teachers' own writing and touch on the issue directly. It was an issue that can be read as underpinning the whole project. In PALM too writing to understand was seen a central concern Thus Somekh (1994a) writes 'writing is an essential part of developing and clarifying our thinking' (p.4) and suggests that such a notion also underlay the principle 'that teachers doing action research should undertake the whole research process, including writing the final report' (p.4). Somekh offers a detailed discussion of the issue, and quotes work from the project in support of her arguments.

In the STRICT project the same concern arose, Hewitt (unpublished) arguing both that the writing process itself is a part of the process of creating knowledge, and that teacher

researchers need to write in order to leave evidence of that process for others to read. However, to quote from the second annual report of the project:

> 'The prospect of writing the report was not viewed favourably by many of those involved in the initial meetings, despite assurances that they:
> 1. provide a permanent record and a means of dissemination;
> 2. help the process of reflection.
>
> At the final meeting in all cases people saw benefits from completing a written report, so that despite being "a chore, not sure that it is worthwhile... it does provide evidence for SMT (Senior Management Team)" and "somewhat onerous, physically and mentally tiring but rewarding". It forced us into analysis, "tedious but necessary, it made staff talk", "hard work". "A permanent touchstone to go back to", "convinces SMT that you have done something".
>
> For some the process of writing had been more positive: "Getting thoughts on paper helped crystallise thoughts", "a self discipline which tied ideas together", "tied things together but revealed more branches"'.
> (Avon Curriculum Review and Evaluation Programme 1987 - 1988 p.15)

Finally, as I noted in the previous section, the form of the teacher's written report is of central interest to the ESACS project, as the project team struggles with the problem of how teacher can write up for the triple aims of furthering their own understanding and practice, meeting the demands of the senior management team in the school, and meeting the requirements of the HE institution when it comes to academic validation of their work.

I have commented on the written forms and purposes of the project products both in this section and in the previous one. On the evidence I have seen looking at all six projects, I would argue that it is a matter of continuing concern and interest for action research which dates at least from Stenhouse's definition of research as 'systematic enquiry made public' (Stenhouse 1983 p 185) It seems to me to be a still unresolved question, the answers to which will in any case change as circumstances and contexts change, as to what exactly the most useful forms and purposes of teachers' written accounts might be.

Spreading the Word

It can be argued that the history of action research has a thread running through it which is to do with the aspiration of establishing action research as the methodology best suited to investigate professional practice with a view to both professional and curriculum development. In four of the projects there is explicit mention of such an aspiration in one form or another, and in a fifth it is implicit in its development.

As I indicated above, at the inception of the *Learning about Learning/Write to Learn Project* it was intended that two counties should collaborate for a couple of years, and that they should then split and look for new partners for the next couple of years, and so on. While this did not work out in practice, another aspect of dissemination was more

successfully built in. In this model teachers who had worked in the initial institutes and workshops were recruited and encouraged to contribute to future institutes and workshops. Both these ideas came from the United States, where there was considerable institutional support and both local and national funding, as a result of which the Bay Area Writing Project became the model for the US national project. Funding and support was very different in the UK, and a similar national dissemination did not occur. In the later 1980s in-service budgets were delegated from LEAs to schools, and teachers' contracts changed and 'directed time' was introduced whereby much more of the teachers' non teaching time was under the control of the school. Teachers' willingness voluntarily to devote yet more of their time to such projects as the *Learning about Learning* project can be seen as thus having been considerably eroded.

The TIQL project also tackled the problem of the dissemination of the action research model of teacher development. They too recruited teacher co-ordinators who were familiar with this way of working to lead the school teams and Ebbutt (1984) provides a detailed study of how this all worked out. In addition one of the aims of the project was:

> 'to contribute to the institutional development of the schools in which the groups were located,' (Elliott 1986 p.ix)

In order to address this aim school teams were urged to find ways of disseminating their findings more widely within their schools. In his later, retrospective discussions of the Ford Teaching Project, Elliott (1991) suggests:

> 'How to institutionalise action research in schools and the educational system emerged as a major problem for our second-order action research.' (Elliott 1991 p.39)

When it came to the TIQL project this institutionalisation problem seems to have been to the forefront. Thus:

> 'Bearing the institutionalisation problem in mind we selected schools in which the senior management was concerned with staff development at the level of the classroom. (Elliott 1991 p.40)

It is not difficult, however, to read the various accounts of the project as being evasive as to the success of the initiative to institutionalise action research in the schools. Ebbutt (1984) for instance, in discussing his case studies of four of the in-school co-ordinators, suggests that his assumption:

> 'that the four co-ordinators had "institutionalised the process of action research in their schools" was an unjustified assumption.' (p.64)

The PALM project had similar concerns but took a somewhat different path. As already noted, above, one of its aims was:

> 'To investigate the effectiveness of action research as a means of teacher professional development in the IT innovation.' (Somekh et al 1990 p.1)

The tangible outcome was a PALM/NCET booklet, similar in format to the *Teachers Voices* booklets: *Supporting Teacher Development Through Action Research.* This builds on the PALM experience to offer advice to advisory teachers about using action research methodology in professional development contexts. The devolvement of in-service budgets to schools means of course that there are fewer advisory teachers about so the booklet may well have been overtaken by the changing times.

The STRICT project can also be read as having an aspiration to institutionalise action research as a mode of professional development, both in the schools themselves, and in the local education authority more widely. Continuity and change were both seen as important. Thus some schools stayed with the project or two or three years, producing a sequence of reports that can be read as evidence of teachers building and developing the work of previous years. And as with two of the previous projects change was envisaged as a process of induction with new people brought on board to learn from those who were already familiar with the approach. Hewitt for instance writes:

> 'Ideally I would have liked to see two co-ordinators, each appointed for two years but with one dropping out each year enabling a new recruit to work alongside an old hand.' (Hewitt Unpublished p.28)

In addition, rather as the *TIQL* project had before it, the STRICT project endeavoured to recruit a support team who were already familiar with an action research approach. In 1990 a policy decision was made to take the STRICT model countywide, and in the Spring of that year courses were run for the whole of the advisory team to implement the policy. Alas the project foundered, in Hewitt's words

> 'with the delegation of budgets to schools and reduction in the LEA's control over INSET.' (ibid. p.29)

The ESACS approach of integrating the individual teacher's professional development with the wider curriculum priorities of the school can be read as a similar strategy for tackling the same problem. ESACS of course is still running, and the number of schools involved has increased from year to year, so it may be that such an approach will result in the creation of a more permanent edifice. Time will tell.

PART 3 CONCLUSIONS

Action Research: Claims and Criticisms

In a forthcoming paper Elliott (Elliott & Sarland, 1995) reviews the some of the claims and criticisms that are levelled against action research, and which framed the *Teachers as Researchers* proposal. In summary, the claims made for action research are: that it enables teachers to bring about changes in pedagogy and curriculum; that it improves the quality of students' learning experiences; that it improves professional collaboration; that it both draws on and contributes to wider educational theory and research; that it contributes to insider research methodology; that it contributes to both personal and institutional development; that it helps teachers to implement innovations in ways that are consistent with their values; and finally that it enables teachers to be more accountable for their practice. By contrast a number of criticisms have been levelled against action research. Questions have been raised about: the claims to knowledge made by action research; the possibility of developing valid insider research methodology; the dominant influence of academic discourses or, by contrast, the tendency of reports to rely too heavily on description; a tendency to be technicist and to ignore wider contexts; an absence of reference to known research findings; and a tendency to concentrate on local incremental change, and a lack of more radical and politically consequential challenge. In addition it is argued that practitioner researchers are inadequately trained for their job, and that there are considerable unacknowledged hidden costs in the form of institutional support of one sort and another.

It will perhaps be recognised that the account I have offered above addresses some of these questions, but is no help with others. I would argue that there is considerable evidence in all six projects that action research enabled teachers to bring about changes in pedagogy and curriculum in their own classrooms. Many of the teachers reports in all six projects contained accounts of pupil perspectives, and it was a matter of explicit comment from the project teams too, and it would not be difficult to find evidence of improvement in the quality of pupil learning experiences. All the projects involved professional collaboration, some of which was with colleagues in-school, and some of which was with colleagues out of school. In addition in all cases there was collaboration with outsiders at LEA or HE level, even with the teacher led *Becoming Our Own Experts*. I would argue, also, that four of the projects, *Becoming Our Own Experts. Learning about Learning*, TIQL and PALM made a contribution to wider educational knowledge and theory within the substantive areas that were being investigated, though some of the *Learning about Learning* materials which were deliberately low key might be seen as concentrating on incremental change. Neither STRICT or ESACS make such claims anyway. Questions of institutional development are more problematic, as I indicated above. TIQL, STRICT and ESACS all had a go at addressing the

problem. The STRICT model looked promising at LEA level but foundered with changing circumstances, and the ESACS model also looks promising, but the jury there is still out.

All the projects were concerned about the question of domination by academic discourse, and *Learning about Learning* and PALM had explicit rhetorics about avoiding the academic apparatus in the written product. This inevitably gives it a more descriptive feel, and will by definition exclude learned reference to previous research. However neither *Becoming Our Own Experts* nor the *Learning about Learning* booklets, nor the *Teachers Voices* series read as if the writers were ignorant of the wider current state of research knowledge. The final product from the TIQL project (Elliott & Ebbutt 1985) has a more academic feel to it as it presents a series of overviews of a larger number of teachers' case studies. As I have noted the ESACS project is tackling the problem from a different perspective, as it tries to find alternative discourses which will still satisfy academic requirements. In passing, the products of all the projects can be read as offering substantial accounts of teachers' practices in ways that render them accountable.

It was an explicit aim of the PALM project to address methodological issues, and they had a specific product (PALM/NCET 1990) to show for it. Methodological concerns were never far below the surface in STRICT either, with frequent comment from the support team on individual case studies, with particular attention paid to the problem of evaluating improvement in the quality of pupils' learning experiences. Methodological concerns can be read as being a central concern for the ESACS project too. It would I think be difficult, however, to claim that any of those projects made a substantial contribution to research methodology.

So far as other claims and criticisms are concerned there is less tangible evidence. It may be that the products of the STRICT project can be read as being more technicist, more concerned with local incremental change, but tending to ignore wider contextual issues. Certainly I would argue that none of the projects offer a substantial or directly politically radical challenge, though individual studies within all of the projects might be read as addressing issues of social and political import.

I have explored six projects and discussed them under a number of headings. I have suggested that central to all of them is a notion of practitioner control and the authenticity of teacher research and teacher produced knowledge. I have suggested that even where projects did not espouse a specific rhetoric of action research with its cycles of investigation and implementation, that none the less they can be seen as action research. The implications of this cut both ways, of course. If it is argued that the development of an official action research methodology is a way for academic institutions to muscle in on practitioner knowledge and to colonise it for its own ends, then it would be possible to read the ESACS project as just such an initiative. Conversely it may be argued that it is only right and proper that the academic study of education must take account of the ways in which practitioners

generate and utilise knowledge, in which case it is possible to read the ESACS project as just such an initiative!

In my section on outsiders and insiders I have effectively, I hope, suggested that the notion of 'pure' teacher knowledge, 'unsullied' by outsider perspective is a myth. In all the projects, even the most self evidently teacher initiated, *Becoming Our Own Experts*, there is a considerable interaction between outsider and insider perspective. The rhetoric in every project is of outsider facilitators of teacher led initiatives, and I am not arguing that this rhetoric did not reflect the reality on the ground, but in every project there is substantial evidence of a productive interaction. This is an issue that in my view needs exploring more widely since I find the notion of 'authentic' teacher knowledge somewhat problematic anyway since it casts teachers in an a-historical frame which ignores the social contexts of their development as teachers in the first place, but this paper is not the place to pursue such a concern.

One of the features of the investigation that I have undertaken that has particularly struck me is the continuing debate about the writing up and presentation of teachers' work. Only *Becoming Our Own Experts* seems relatively unselfconscious about this. But in all the other projects it seems to have been a matter of conscious reflection, debate and decision. All the projects are characterised by an assumption or an insistence that teachers need to write up their own work. In two of them, *Learning about Learning* and PALM there was a deliberate emphasis on what I have called straightforward non-academic accounts, while TIQL took a middle way. In those four projects there was considerable interest in disseminating the substantive findings of the teachers more or less widely. STRICT and ESACS had a different rhetoric, to do with representation of the process of curriculum development itself. The form of publication of the STRICT case studies, and the contexts of the production of the case studies in the ESACS project would suggest that wider dissemination of the teachers' work was not the first priority. It is worth noting too that these last two projects did/do not have a substantive focus - rather they are concerned with professional development and the improvement of practice in the classroom. In this, where the evidence is available, as it is with the teachers' evaluations in the STRICT project, they seem to have been very successful. Even so the form and presentation of teachers' work is of abiding interest in these two projects too.

I noted above the issue of institutionalisation. Both STRICT and ESACS took/have taken specific approaches to institutionalisation, the first at LEA level, and the second at school level, and it was a concern in other projects too. The changing approaches reflect, I would argue, the changing times. In an earlier article (Elliott and Sarland 1995) we noted the shift of funded action research from the large scale funded projects such as TIQL, and a late entrant in the field, PALM, to much more low key and small scale projects often funded in-house by higher education institutions of which ESACS would be a prime example. In

addition it is striking that the two LEA funded projects that I have noted in this paper both came to an end in 1990. Two reasons were cited to account for this: the devolvement of LEA budgets into schools and the introduction of directed time for teachers. The response of one higher education institution in response to this is the ESACS project, in which the curriculum development priorities of individual schools take precedence, but as a result there is no overall focus for the project. Paradoxically it looks as if this might lead at last to the institutionalisation of action research as the dominant mode of professional and curriculum development. But the downside appears to be that the lack of a substantive focus from an outside funding agency with a specific and declared interest, such as the National Council for Educational Technology, means that the action research is less likely to produce substantive insights which might contribute educational knowledge of wider interest to the profession at large.

Another factor that I have not addressed at all is the introduction of the National Curriculum. It may be that this too is a contributory factor to the changing practice of action research as we have seen it practised in these six projects. Both PALM and the ESACS project make reference to the National Curriculum, though it does not seem to have been a major issue for the PALM teachers. In the ESACS project, school curriculum development plans will of necessity be framed within the National Curriculum, but it is not clear to me precisely what effect this is having. Perhaps this too is a question that needs to be left hanging.

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